

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

news release

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WHOOPEE EGGS HATCH SUCCESSFULLY; NEW RECORD IN CAPTIVITY

Seven of nine whooping crane eggs taken from the Canadian wilds in May for incubating at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland have hatched successfully, but one of the young whoopers died of pneumonia, the Interior Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife announced today.

The achievement brings the number of captive whoopers to a record 24. Of the captive cranes, 10 others resulted from eggs taken from the Canadian nesting grounds (3 by the 1967 expedition and 7 by the 1968 expedition). Eight other cranes have been in captivity for a number of years.

Three of the 10 cranes hatched successfully last June died of disease or infection, but improved facilities at Patuxent will reduce the likelihood of mortality this year. Part of the baby cranes' pens are indoors where temperatures can be regulated. Their diet is superior, too--fewer starches and more of other nutrients--because of successful dietary experiments on Florida sandhill cranes at the Federal research enclave near Washington.

Canadian and United States wildlife officials hope to build flocks of these birds so some of their descendants may be returned to the wild. About 50 whoopers remain in the wild, making their annual migrations between Canada and the Texas Gulf Coast. The international effort to protect this endangered species has extended over three decades and attracted worldwide attention.

Ray C. Erickson, assistant director at Patuxent, and Glen Smart, chief of the Center's endangered species propagation section, went on the egg-gathering mission which was aided by Canadian wildlife biologist Ernie Kuyt.

The men traveled to Wood Buffalo National Park nesting area in the Canadian Province of Alberta by helicopter. As in past missions, Kuyt left the helicopter, carefully approached a nest, took one egg and put it in a protective woolen stocking. He then carried it to the helicopter where Erickson and Smart were waiting with a portable incubator.

The disturbance was only temporary for the mother crane. She stood nearby and returned quickly to the nest to protect the remaining egg. Biologists point out that, even though nests usually contain two eggs, whooping cranes are inclined to rear only a single offspring in the wild.

The egg-gathering successes of the past three years have greatly contributed to man's knowledge of the tallest bird of North America, says Erickson. Cranes hatched at the Center in 1967 have reached full size, although they still have a few of their juvenile feathers.

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